

# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF  
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS  
(Section of the Library Association)

HON. EDITOR: FRANK M. GARDNER  
(Willesden Public Libraries)

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## The Library Assistant ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE next meeting of the Section will be held at Mitcham on 12th December, 1934. Between 6 and 6.30 p.m., the new Public Library, London Road, will be open for inspection, and at 7 p.m. the business meeting will take place in the Council Offices. This will take the form of a round-table discussion on library methods, under the following heads:

Service counters; opened by Mr. H. Wilson (Leyton).

Cataloguing; opened by Mr. F. Fordham (Edmonton).

Records on cards; opened by Miss I. Kennedy (Ilford).

Mitcham may be reached as follows: Tube train to Tooting Broadway, thence by Omnibus No. 77 or 88. Tram No. 30. Southern electric railway to West Croydon. Thence by tram No. 30.

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Social event for December at Chaucer House:

6th December (Thursday).—Presidential reception, 8 p.m. A.A.L. members are invited.

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The joint meeting with the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association at the Leytonstone Branch Library, on 7th November, was thoroughly enjoyed by those who made the long journey into the wilds. The library we saw would have repaid a much longer journey, while the debate on the necessity for public libraries provided amusement and some instruction (at least for the principal speakers). The general debate began with a mass attack on the unfortunate proposer of the motion, but Israel proved to be divided among itself. The high light of the evening was a lesson in impromptu speaking by the opposer of the motion, Mr. Clulow, in closing the debate, which deserved all the applause it received. It was worth noticing that more people took part in the discussion than is usually the case, which seems to show that the informal debate is a better incitement to speech than the formal paper.

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The social meetings at Chaucer House have so far proved all the success we hoped for, and all the evidence shows that they are providing a real need. At the first, a company of about fifty members assembled at Chaucer House, and a programme rendered by the staff of Bermondsey Public Libraries was received with much appreciation. The programme consisted of musical items

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by the Bermondsey String Quintet, vocal items, and character sketches by Mr. F. Hickman. On 31st October there was a somewhat larger attendance. A Hallowe'en party was given by the Dagenham Public Library staff, which contained such ingredients as mashed potatoes, ghost stories, bobbing apples, and weird music, all at the command of three witches (who owed much to *Macbeth*). The evening terminated with several rounds of "Murder."

In consequence of the resignation of Mr. W. A. Munford, there is a casual vacancy for a London member of the Council. Nominations for this vacancy, which will be filled at the January meeting on an election by show of hands, must reach the Hon. Secretary, Central Library, Hendon, N.W.4, not later than Wednesday, 12th December.

At a meeting held in the Mathematical theatre of University College during the Association Conference this year an informal Circle of Library Workers with Children came into being and an executive was formed, consisting of: *Chairman*, Miss M. N. Hummerston, of Leeds; *Secretary*, Miss G. M. Hunt, East Ham; *Committee*—Miss Farmer (Coventry), Miss Hayler (Croydon), Miss Watt Smith (Sheffield).

It is proposed that a series of short articles (about 1,000 words), on library work with children should appear in *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*, and the Secretary of the Circle would be glad to receive any contributions by children's librarians.

Following the football notice printed in *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT* for July, a meeting attended by representatives of those libraries especially interested was held at Chaucer House. As a result of this meeting, a series of games was arranged between the Bermondsey, Hammersmith, Poplar, St. Pancras, West Ham, and Woolwich Public Libraries. Each of these libraries is to play the other five twice, and it is hoped to compile a league table from the results of these matches. Paddington Public Libraries were unable to form a complete team, but with a nucleus of staff members, they are raising a team, and are giving other libraries friendly games. Matches will all be played on Sunday mornings, and results of matches and forthcoming fixtures will be announced in *THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT*.

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The possible extension of the football scheme to cover other branches of sport, is under consideration by the Social Committee of the A.A.L., and further announcements will follow.

Mr. Ulveling has been unable to contribute his usual article on American affairs to this issue. But Miss Elsie Gordon, Librarian of the Conely Branch Library, Detroit, proves, we think, a very good substitute.

## PRONOUNCEMENTS

THE recently issued report of the committee of enquiry into the establishment of a Yorkshire Regional Library System is a most interesting document, and the progress of the experiment which the resolutions outline will be watched by all librarians in the country. The impetuous believer in co-operation may characterize the report as timid, but one is inclined to think rather that Yorkshire is profiting by other people's experience. In this report the question of co-operation is discussed for the first time from an entirely realistic point of view, without an ounce of superfluous verbiage or straying from terms of reference. The committee have not approached their problem with any idea of "co-operation is a good thing; let's have it," but have approached it with due caution and foresight, keeping in mind always the needs of the area they were considering, and (one imagines) the several criticisms which have been made of schemes already in existence. In considering the generous offer by the Carnegie trustees of £2,000 towards the compilation of a union catalogue, they have borne in mind, not only cost of compilation, but cost of maintenance, and so any idea of a union catalogue has for the present been deferred.

Instead, it is proposed to establish four zones, centred on the large cities of Leeds, Hull, Sheffield, and Bradford. Applications for books will pass through these zones in rotation, to be forwarded to the National Central Library by the last if not met. The basis of the scheme is a recognition of the obvious fact that small libraries are borrowers, not lenders, and library co-operation is not a matter of mutual aid by equals, but the aid of the strong to the weak. So only seven large libraries in four towns will be lenders: the rest of the participating libraries of the system will be borrowers. Since

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68 per cent. of the stock in the area is concentrated into these libraries, the committee appears to be justified in its attitude. It is certainly doubtful whether the remaining 32 per cent. of stock, spread over fifty libraries, would supply sufficient books to justify the expenditure of £400 a year on a union catalogue. Special and local collections, of course, have not been forgotten, and a bibliographical survey of the county is to be undertaken with a view to gathering particulars of these resources at each centre.

There appears to be no reason why the scheme should not succeed. It has been extremely well thought out, it is economical (estimated cost is £30 a year), and it has the beauty of simplicity. One wishes the scheme every success. If it is, THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT will have been a successful prophet.

F. M. G.



## WOMEN IN LETTERS

HELEN SIMPSON

IT is an honour to be asked to address such a gathering as this; it is also, for me, the opportunity to repay part of a debt. It is eighteen years since I first wrote my name in the entrance book of the Radcliffe Camera, the Bodleian reading-room; since then I have spent a good part of my life wandering in and out of public libraries. I go there because I enjoy the feeling of having books all round, under my feet, over my head; this feeling quiets the dread I had as a child, that one day I should have read all the books there were in the world. The mere sight of the British Museum catalogues is comfortable to such a complex. Also I go, because I know that no matter what enquiry I am upon, I am going to find skilled help and friendliness. There is something about handling books, as about handling wine, that mellows the character, and it is this friendliness, this willingness to impart and share, which I regard as my debt of honour to-night.

The theme of this talk was suggested by an argument I had one night with a combative friend, who said that in literature women had nothing of their own to give the world. "That's not true," I said at once. Then he set about me. "You mean to say that there's any quality in women's writing that differs from anything men can do?" He began, of course, with Sappho; what was characteristically feminine about Sappho? I had to admit that there was

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nothing; indeed, an eighteenth-century translator says of her second ode, that the English reader will only enter into the beauties of it if he suppose it to have been written by a man. "What about the learned ladies of France, Christine de Pisan, Louise Labé? What is the *Heptameron* but an imitation of Boccaccio?" I couldn't answer that. "Very well, come on to the later people. Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Centlivre, are you going to say that their work has something which distinguishes it from the work of, let us say, Farquhar or Vanburgh? Mademoiselle de Scudéry and Madame de la Fayette in France; their work is of their period. You may like it or be bored by it, but it is not to be distinguished from the work of men of the same calibre, writing at the same time——"

When it came to the nineteenth century, then I had rather more, certainly, to offer; but on the whole I was getting the worst of this argument, through having voiced a conviction before I had assembled facts to back it. Luckily, I had by my hand that little classic, the *Pillow book of Sei Shônagon*. Picking it up at random, I read this passage aloud:

"It is tiresome when a lover who is leaving one at dawn says that he must look for a fan or pocket book that he left somewhere about the room last night. As it is still too dark to see anything, he goes fumbling about all over the place, knocking into everything and muttering to himself, 'How very odd!' Indeed, the success of a lover depends greatly on his method of departure."

Now, that whole paragraph, and especially that last phrase, might have been written by Jane Austen, had she allowed herself to deal with such situations. It might have been written by Fanny Burney. It might have been written by Lady Murasaki, or Miss Rose Macaulay. It is not a man's phrase, simply because it is not a man's point of view.

When my argumentative friend had gone I sat down to trace that instinctive sureness of mine to its cause. There is nothing more difficult to do; though few things are easier than to invent a possible cause for an effect. I went back a long way to my belief, which has a good backing of physiology, that men and women are creatures having different functions, neither more nor less important; complementary, but different. I followed this up with an hypothesis which also does not lack support—that the functions of the body, its uses and habits, are not without their effect upon the working of the mind. What are the jobs for which women physically are fitted, which they have done through the centuries? They breed and tend children. They concern them-

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selves with the house, the kitchen, the garden, the church; later, with dress and the social graces. Revolutions and war affect their way of life very little. They live as individuals, observing the particular, and from it deducing the general. Their needs are for comfort, and power over the things they know. They accept rather than challenge. Their lives go to a slow physical rhythm very different from the masculine caprices and frenzies. They perceive these caprices and frenzies against a background of their own comparative steadiness, and find the juxtaposition laughable. (This attribute is the origin of the legend that women have no sense of humour.) Finally, they care little or nothing for ritual or for precedent, and this is the reason why male institutions, such as freemasonry or Parliament, appear to them fantastic, and a waste of time.

Now, having worked this out, I began to see where I was arriving. I began to see just where we are indebted to the women; and to understand why it is, not to their public performances that we must look, but to the private talks on paper, meant only for a few eyes. Hence my title, "Women in letters." Here is the writing they do best, the writing the world would be poorer without. "Good style comes from the heart; thus you may find women writing like angels who never learned to write, while pedants, for ever studying writing as an art, never can, nor ever will, put two sentences together that anyone cares to read." That was the opinion of Diderot, and I think a true one.

Some examples will show you, better than any words of mine can do, the quality which sets these feminine productions apart, and gives them their value; the quality on which I could not put my finger when my friend challenged me. You are all familiar with the letters of Margaret Paston; you know their worth as an historical commentary. (Hannah More, herself a letter-writer of charm, found their style barbarous, though she supposed they might serve at a time when there were no newspapers.) But perhaps those of Isabella Guicciardini, fifty years later, may not be known to you. They were written to her husband, brother of the historian, at that time Commissar in Arezzo, and they give news of the family, the servants, and the farm.

"Carissimo Luigi, I have three of your letters, one of the 7th, the others November 13th and 18th; let me answer all those things you ask in order of their importance.

"First the wine; we are short, but there is no way to get more, whether from Ripalte or Mulino. It has been a poor year. The farmers are troublesome. . . . Giovanni, a day or two ago, said to me that he had had enough of working. He could not get labour if there was none to be had, and in the

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next breath proposed a bargain; he to find me workmen if I could get him men for the fields. I told him I would make no bargain, that he must settle with you when you came.

"Read my last letter again; you will find I told you that the hoops on the great cask would certainly not hold. I sold this wine therefore, saving only enough to take us as far as Easter. There was a hogshead of second pressing stuff, which I had thought would do for the servants, twelve barrels about, which would have lasted another three months. But as luck would have it, the hoops gave one night, and in the morning, there was all the wine on the floor. Imagine my state of mind; for now I shall have to buy back some of what I sold, or get out more from Florence.

"I am sorry that you always seem to be in such discomfort and turmoil when you write. You should do as I do; undertake such business as pleases you, leave the rest if you can, and trust all to time. But man may not look for peace in this world, and for us at our age it is worse; we are more easily made irritable.

"I have given no orders yet to cut firewood, by reason of the weather, which does nothing but rain since I do not know when. We are using for fuel the olives left from our oil, and the oak by the road that was cut down."

Then she gives details of this oil which could not be taken to town by reason of the state of the roads. What is she to do? By the time his letter comes with instructions she may have missed two markets. She has bought three pigs, and a sucking pig to fatten up for Carnival; it cost 5 lire 12 soldi. The pigs can eat up the honey, which has gone bad in the cellar. The Greek wine is settling down, but is not clear yet. Then she goes on to the health of the parish priest:

"Sir Antonio begs you will hold him excused (from writing). He is taken with a pain so cruel that the very stones must pity him. I have myself heard him cry out as loud as any woman in labour. He has no fever, and can say his mass now and then. The doctor sounded him, and it is not a stone as he thought, but a fistula. He may live months yet in this agony. God give him patience.

"I have no more to write, and thank God for it. What with letters to you, and letters to Simona, and all the accounts to keep, you must pardon me if I write more seldom than you like. There is much to do, and I lack the wit for it. Hold me in memory, and Christ keep you. ISABELLA."

That is like the landscape of a fifteenth-century picture. It holds the same relation to the life of the time that such a background, with its little hills and vineyards, holds to the posturing saints and heroes in the foreground. The



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woman who writes is a matriarch, who shows common sense and good humour; paying attention to those affairs by which nations and families live, trusting in God and in time. We have plenty of instances in our English literature of them: Mrs. Evelyn is perhaps the best known, if you except Margaret Paston. How much better it is than the huntin' and shootin' and heraldry of, for example, Dame Juliana Berners, all imitative stuff, stiff writing and stiff reading. "Le bon style vient du cœur," no doubt about it.

That's an example of the housewife. Now come forward a century, and at once you are in the thick of an embarrassment of riches. By 1650 all the great letter-writers are in full swing both in France and England. The names of Madame de Sévigné, Madame de la Fayette, and Dorothy Osborne must be perfectly familiar to you. But I wonder if you know a Frenchwoman, and great lady, who was a friend of the first two, and wrote as well as either of them, Madame de Villars? She was mother of the great Marshal who fought us in Flanders, and at one time ambassadress in Spain. It is from Spain that her best letters come, and the witty phrase which for a time served as a kind of proverb in France; *il n'y a qu'à être en Espagne, pour n'avoir plus d'envie d'y bâtir des châteaux*. Which one may modernize and translate by saying that aviators don't build castles in the air. Here is her letter of the 16th October, 168c, to Madame de Coulanges:

"First of all, Madame, let me speak of this morning's trifling occurrence, nothing more nor less than an earthquake about a psalm's-length in duration. M. de Villars in his bed, I in mine, felt them both sway. He rose, thinking by reason of our late horrible rains that the house's foundations must be sinking away; I had no such thought, but with a loud scream proclaimed the truth, that the earth was to blame. Three shocks we had that shook our whole house, as the wind shakes a tree. In church the priests saying mass had some ado to keep the wine in their chalices from spilling. As for the public squares and streets, they were immediately filled with men and women in their night-shirts, dreading, yet not knowing how to escape, the danger of houses crashing down upon them. I had not supposed that to all Spain's other discomforts, the incommmodity of being swallowed up alive would be added; great cracks have appeared in the earth, such as were never seen during any such visitation before.

"On Sunday last, late in the evening, I went to the Queen. She showed no very great desire to visit the Escorial, whose chief claim to singularity is a sumptuous room where the coffins of her predecessors are laid after death. She put a good face on it, however, being very willing to please the King. I felt a little guilty yesterday to receive a letter from her, saying that she had not

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found in this palace half the glories I described; to tell the truth I laid on the colour rather thickly in order to induce her to go.

"I cannot end without some word of the manner in which this Court travels, which it does very little, only from here to Aranjuez or the Escorial; seven leagues, no more, but it costs the King enormous sums each time. Picture at least 150 Court ladies, señoras de honor, and ladies like our maids of honour in France, called Camaristas, and their servants. The señoras are always elderly widows, whose dress never varies, but the younger ladies put on their best, with hats plumed and worn in the most gallant manner, and mantillas, as they call them, over their shoulders. These mantillas are neither mantle nor scarf, properly speaking; they are of velvet with gold and silver embroidery, some green, some flame colour. The ladies wear them curiously, one end under, the other over the shoulder, so that one arm is kept free. This is their most graceful dress, and they do it justice. Adorers hand them into their carriages, and then follow after at the gallop; some of these gentlemen keep their incognito by means of hats pulled down and cloaks about their faces; but the ladies know pretty well who they are for all that. The Queen wore a hat with black and yellow plumes, but no mantilla; for it is written that Queens are not as other women, and may die of cold rather than cover themselves sensibly. The Court goes thus to the Escorial, then, on the day after All Saints, to pray for all the Kings and Queens in their coffins; after which it goes back as it came. But for my part if I were their Majesties I should look for some place in my Kingdom where there were no earthquakes, and there pitch my tent.

"Were it not that the Courier is waiting, I believe I could talk to you till morning. How shall we account for this, Madame? For in the ordinary way, there is nothing I detest so much as writing."

If you have a chance, get Madame de Villars for yourself, and read her at the same time that you study somebody like Saint-Simon on this marriage with Spain. The little queen was daughter of Monsieur and of that Henrietta of England whose story Miss Margaret Irwin has so admirably told in *Royal flush*. Read of the treaties, the processions, the jewels; and then turn to Madame de Villars and find a child of seventeen sent into a foreign country for ever, knowing nothing of the customs or language, clinging to her French ambassador, who, because the Spanish King hated France, and the Spanish ladies might be jealous, must keep away from her, accept no presents, never speak with the child alone. Turn over the coin of history, and on the reverse, behind all the shields and blazons, as often as not you find a woman's head.

I want, now, to show you the characteristic of pretty self-mockery at its best, and though this is common to most women letter-writers, it is superbly

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displayed in the following, from Fanny Burney to her sister, date March 15th, 1777:

"You say you have much more to say, had you paper; surely never before had anyone the meanness to avow so stingy an excuse! However, if you can't afford to buy, why, beg! Or if you are too modest for that, why, steal; for stealing can never impeach your modesty, and that, you know, is a female's first recommendation, since the very action itself, far from discovering any boldness, manifests an internal diffidence of being welcome to what is taken. Now, as I hope I have cleared up this point to your satisfaction and to the utter extinction of all vulgar prejudices, I entreat that I may never again hear so shabby an apology."

She goes on to tell how they pass their time:

"Imprimis: we walk. Mais hélas! scarce have I wandered over half a meadow, ere the black winds whistle round my head, off flies my faithless hat; my perfidious cloak endeavours to follow, even though it clings with well-acted fondness to my neck. . . . My shoes, too, though they cannot like the rest, brave me to my teeth, are equally false and worthless; for far from aiding me by springing forward with the generous zeal they owe me, they fail me in the very moment I require assistance, sink me in bogs, pop me into the mud, and attaching themselves rather to the mire than to the feet which guide them, threaten me perpetually with desertion.

"Secondly: we talk; that you can do yourself, so I shall not enter into a minute discussion of the point.

"Thirdly: we write; that is, thus: Mr. Crisp writes to Miss Simmons; Mr. Hamilton to the butcher; Miss Cooke, a list of clothes for the washer-woman; and as to me—do you know that I write to you every evening, while the family play at cards? The folks here often marvel at your ingratitude in sending me so few returns in kind. (She was writing Evelina under cover of these letters.)

"Fourthly: we read.

"Fifthly: we eat. There is something in this part of our daily occupation, too singular and uncommon to be passed over, without some particular motive and observation. Our method is as follows: we have certain substances of various sorts, consisting chiefly of beasts, birds, and vegetables, which being first roasted, boiled, or baked, are put upon dishes either of pewter, earthenware, or china; and then being cut into small divisions, every plate receives a part. After this, with the aid of a knife and fork, the divisions are made still smaller; they are then (care being taken not to maim the mouth by the above offensive weapons) put between the lips, where by the aid of the teeth the divisions are made yet more delicate, till, diminishing almost insensibly, they are then swallowed.

"I must continue my account of our Lives in our next."

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I won't comment on that, except to say that the unmistakable tang of that phrase about stealing, so very like the dryness we associate with Jane Austen, is not a matter of education or period. It is purely feminine. Next, for common sense, and a clear notion of values, I offer this, from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. It is difficult to make choice among her letters; there is one in which, anticipating Samuel Butler by some hundred and fifty years, she writes to her daughter:

"You are no more obliged to me for bringing you into the world than I am to you for coming into it, and I never made use of that commonplace argument as exacting any return of affection. There was a mutual necessity on us both to part at that time, and no obligation on either side."

The rest is tempting, but I pass it over in favour of this shrewd and sane advice to the Countess of Bute on the bringing up of daughters; the date is 10th January, 1752:

"I do not doubt your prudence in their education, neither can I say anything particular relating to it at this distance, different tempers requiring different management. In general, never attempt to govern them (as most people do) by deceit; if they find themselves cheated, even in trifles, it will so far lessen the authority of their instructor as to make them neglect all their future admonitions; and if possible, breed them free from prejudice: those contracted in the nursery often influence the whole life after. I am sensible my own natural temper is too indulgent; I think it the least dangerous error, yet still, it is an error. I can only say with truth that I do not know in my whole life having ever endeavoured to impose on you, or give a false colour to anything that I represented to you. If your daughters are inclined to love reading, do not check them of their inclination by hindering them of the diverting part of it; it is as necessary for the amusement of women, as the reputation of men; but teach them not to expect or desire any applause from it. Let their brothers shine, and let them content themselves with making their lives easier by it, which I experimentally know is more effectually done by study than any other way. . . . People that do not read, or work for a livelihood, have many hours they know not how to employ, especially women, who commonly fall into vapours, or something worse. I am afraid you will think this letter very tedious: forgive it as coming from your most affectionate mother."

The last example is from the letters<sup>1</sup> of that astonishing woman, Mary Kingsley, who one day walked out of a respectable home—but only after the various ties which held her to it had been broken by death—and strolled off up

<sup>1</sup> *To my horror I find that the example I quote is not from a letter; but her style and matter are equally conversational in full-dress or slippers.*

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the Niger, dressed in a wine-gored skirt and a little round fur toque which is now preserved by the Royal Geographical Society in a glass case. It is her extreme and supreme casualness, her acceptance of new circumstances as though they had been familiar from the cradle that is so delightful here. There is no self-consciousness whatever. When I die there are two women I want to meet and talk with; one of them is Mary Kingsley.

This is not the whole letter; the first part of it tells how she shared the shelter of a block of rock with a leopard, who she says, swore, "all the time, softly, but repeatedly and profoundly." Then she goes on:

"I have never hurt a leopard intentionally; I am habitually kind to animals, and besides I do not think it is ladylike to go shooting things with a gun. Twice, however, I have been in collision with them. On one occasion a big leopard had attacked a dog, who, with her family, was occupying a broken-down hut next to mine. The dog was a half-breed boarhound, and a savage brute on her own account. I, being roused by the uproar, rushed out into the feeble moonlight, thinking she was having one of her habitual turns-up with other dogs, and I saw a whirling mass of animal matter within a yard of me. I fired two mushroom-shaped native stools in rapid succession into the brown of it, and the meeting broke up into a leopard and a dog. The leopard crouched, I think to spring on me. I can see its great beautiful lambent eyes still, and I seized an earthen water-cooler and flung it straight at them. It was a noble shot; it burst on the leopard's head like a shell, and the leopard went for bush one time. Twenty minutes after people began to drop in cautiously and inquire if anything was the matter, and I civilly asked them to go and ask the leopard in the bush, but they firmly refused. We found the dog had got her shoulder slit open as if by a blow from a cutlass, and the leopard had evidently seized the dog by the scruff of her neck, but owing to the loose folds of skin no bones were broken, and she got round all right after much ointment from me, which she paid me for with several bites. Do not mistake this for a sporting adventure. I no more thought it was a leopard than that it was a lotus when I joined the fight."

I have taken all these at random. You may find for yourselves, in the published letters of these women, pages of greater historical or literary interest. What do they recount, those I have chosen? The provisioning and heating of a farm; the description of a few dresses; the spending of a country holiday; and if the matter of the last is more unusual, the attitude towards leopards is exactly the same as that which Isabella Guicciardini displays to the accidents of her farm. Here we come to my point. Two common denominators you will find in all; one the least, and one the greatest. The greatest is, I think, a good-humoured acceptance of life as it is for women; composed of

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small interests, little glory, some absurdities, and a powerful conviction that in the doing and observation of these smallnesses lies the main savour of life. "There is no speculation in those eyes," that looked on wars or ceremonies as the things they are; these women keep the child's logic, and the child's small clear voice. "But the Emperor has no clothes!" you may hear them say, as the stately masculine processions pass. That is the greatest common denominator. The lesser is even more valuable. It is the power to see oneself in proportion against a background of period, and to mock one's own antics when the shadow they throw becomes ever so slightly grotesque. If you want picturesqueness you may compare this mockery of earthquakes, family ties, physical danger, or the routine of love and meals with the graceful game a cat plays when it tosses and pats the body of the mouse it has just killed. The cat has patiently watched and contrived to get the mouse, has exerted quickness and strength to kill it. The mouse stands between the cat and hunger. It will eventually be eaten. Meanwhile, it serves as a toy; the boredom of the chase, the interest of the meal are both forgotten for the time and turned into fun, into graceful and gratuitous play.

There is my case: that women have contributed very little that is original or of value to literature proper. It is no use trying to dodge facts. You cannot, on the strength of Jane Austen and Sappho, make a claim to set the work of women in literature above or beside the great body of men's achievement. It is as absurd as to attempt to make out the same claim for women's place in war, by quoting Boadicea and St. Joan. But that they have something very delicate, delightful, and real to say for themselves, something no man ever has, or can imitate, I believe I have begun to prove to you. You have only to read for yourselves along the lines I have indicated to drive this proof home.



## CATERING FOR THE ADOLESCENT (concluded)

SIDNEY W. ANDERSON

THE Coventry 1929 report informs us that an attempt to meet the reading needs of Adolescents was made by forming an intermediate collection of books at each Home Reading Library. No separate room was provided: in the Junior Library was displayed a selection of "Books for older boys and girls" and in the Adult Library "Some intermediate books for general reading."

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Many of the books in these collections were by writers with whose work the boys and girls had already become familiar in the course of reading through the ordinary Junior stock. During the year under review 16,765 volumes were borrowed, of which 8,276 were from classes other than fiction. A detailed record of the issues in the various classes appears at the end of the report. Language and Literature scored the highest non-fiction percentage, 2,942 volumes being issued. Next came History and Travel with 1,701, Science with 1,392, and Useful Arts with 1,132. Another group, Sociology, Education, and Amusements (I presume the headings given in the table were those used in labelling the book-stock) scored 628. Music, separated from the general heading "Fine Arts," was bottom with 18. It is evident that at the time of this report Intermediate Provision was looked upon as a real need, and it seems the greatest pity in the world that Coventry has abandoned the scheme. Mr. Nowell's distinguished successor, the present City Librarian, does not believe that a separate Intermediate department serves any really useful purpose in a medium-sized library. In common with other opponents of the scheme, he makes the problem of avoiding duplication his strong suit; but I must admit to great difficulty in concurring with his expressed opinion that " ' Adolescence ' is a vague term and, as regards reading, may cover an age period of 9 or 10 to 70." I know that mental ages do vary, but I venture to think that the kind of provision I am advocating would meet the demands of 75 per cent. to 85 per cent. of readers between 14 and 18. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the Intermediate collections at Coventry have now been absorbed into the Adult and Junior stocks. Walthamstow holds the field.

So much for schemes in operation. I now propose to embark on a short discussion on the ways and means of supplying Intermediate provision. For libraries with no available separate accommodation and an absolute minimum of funds, there is the method which Coventry employed—collections set apart in the Junior and Adult departments. Most libraries would probably start by drawing on the old stock to fill the new shelves: while duplicate copies could be used to a certain extent in this way, the nucleus of the Intermediate stock should consist of newly-purchased books. Shoddiness and shabbiness must be avoided: better a small stock of bright and tastefully-produced editions than a large one of what some people, embittered by experience, would describe as "library books." Nothing creates a worse impression than a shelf of cheap editions, in the flimsiest of publishers' casings which are being made to undergo a period of service for which they were never intended. If attention is paid to

## The Library Assistant

making the Intermediate stock as physically attractive as possible, an indelible impression will be made on the mind of the young reader (a more lasting impression than that made on the mind of a child by an attractive Junior library, important though this last is as a preliminary step), and, as an adult, he will not associate the terms "public library" and "musty books," as so many present-day readers seem to. These remarks apply to any Intermediate stock, and I now return to the question of its disposition. The Coventry method commends itself to the followers of Mrs. Willert, with the difference that there is a certain corner to which bewildered new-comers to the Adult library can gravitate, with or without personal guidance. Personally, I have always found that this alleged desire of the 14-year-old to become a fully-fledged adult reader without any intermediate stage is more apparent than real. If you can overcome their reserve (an admittedly difficult task) and obtain some sort of idea of their reading tastes, I think you will find a preference for gradual development in nine cases out of ten. Naturally, you do not let them know what you are thinking. To be told that a book is "too advanced for you to read just yet" is one of the most galling experiences that the young reader can undergo. He will either read it immediately, and fail to appreciate it, thus spoiling his chances of "discovering" and enjoying that author later on, or he will sever his connexion with the library, disgusted with the childish attitude which has been displayed towards him. I suppose that most adolescent readers who profess any liking at all for literature have a certain period when they read indiscriminately; Byron one day, Siegfried Sassoon the next, Shakespeare and John Drinkwater, Smollett and Hardy. This is healthy and natural, but it is the job of the Intermediate library to see that the period is not too lengthy, or mental indigestion will result, with a consequent impairment to the powers of forming good taste. The problem, then, is to guide the adolescent without his being too immediately conscious of it. What is the solution? Not, I think, the Coventry method, although that is a step in the right direction. There are two other possible ways: one the Walthamstow method, and the other a compromise which I will outline in a moment.

At Walthamstow extremely gratifying results have been attained by using a separate department, from which readers are transferred on reaching the age of 17 years. This is open only in the evenings, from 5.30 to 8, excepting Saturdays, when it operates from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., and Wednesdays, when it closes all day. Separate issue records are kept, and the department is virtually isolated, being reached by a separate entrance. I am



## The Library Assistant

assured that a certain interlending of stocks takes place between the three departments—Adult, Intermediate, and Junior—but I note from the printed brochure given to those joining the Intermediate that the *assistant* will procure any books required from the other departments. Is this the way to solve our problem? Some will ask for the books they want, but many will surely be too timid, too proud, or else ignorant of the fact that the Adult library may possess their heart's desire. Can Walthamstow be sure, or even nearly sure, that their adolescent readers are being as ideally catered for as external appearances in the form of statistics show? If so—and it is quite possible—they have solved our problem.

I am not quite sure, however, that the Walthamstow method *is* the ideal, despite the apparent success of the scheme. Let me explain briefly the compromise which I have seen in operation, and which I would commend to your notice as a possible way out of the difficulty. It consists of a separate Intermediate room with two doors, one leading directly into the Adult library and the other into the Junior library. When the Junior library is open the door leading to the Adult is closed, and *vice-versa*. Thus the room can be kept open all day, entrance being obtained from one department or the other. Child readers of advanced reading age can browse in the Intermediate room, but cannot stray into the Adult library. Young adult readers can go straight to the room where they know they will find the kind of books they want, and (one hopes) an enthusiastic but unobtrusive assistant, who will give help when required. It is much more likely that a timid reader will approach this assistant for help about books in the room than that the same reader would bother the Walthamstow assistant to get books from the Adult library for him. In any event, the Adult staff is also at his disposal, as he is an adult reader. For, under this scheme, there are no "Intermediate" registered readers. When a child reaches the age of 14 or so he joins the Adult library and all the issues from the Intermediate room are made at the Adult or Junior counters. The books and book-cards should be marked in some distinctive way to ensure that on return the stock is shelved in its proper place. Separate issue statistics can be kept, if desired, but it is easy to tell whether the room (which should contain tables and chairs, etc., for reading) is being used; and an occasional tour of inspection will reveal the number of issues recorded on the date-labels. As I have previously indicated, the nucleus of the stock should consist of books specially purchased for the Intermediate library. The one assistant (or preferably two, as this will probably eliminate the necessity of supplying

## The Library Assistant

"relief") can be made responsible for all the work of the department, and should have a desk in the room. For his book-selection he can use the standard sources, with certain additions (*e.g.* the *Walthamstow intermediate non-fiction catalogue*), checking with the Adult and Junior Catalogues to avoid duplication. Since the resources of both departments are directly available to Intermediate readers, the oft-quoted objection that Intermediate provision is inseparable from duplication hardly arises. One other point. Those who say that the 14-year-old desires full Adult status will murmur that, having the Adult department and stock at his disposal, he will not use the Intermediate library. My reply is that personal observation has proved the reverse to be the case, and, in the system of which I am writing, there is no special assistant to help readers.

I must conclude by recording my grateful thanks to all those, too numerous to mention by name, who have helped me from the other side of the Atlantic. In this country I am especially indebted to: Mr. Nowell, now City Librarian of Manchester; Mr. Austin Hinton, of Coventry; Mr. Roebuck, of Walthamstow, and his Intermediate assistant, Mr. W. F. B. Jones. The courtesy of all those with whom I corresponded made an interesting investigation even pleasanter than I had expected. The brief reading list which follows includes sources from which I have gained information, as well as a few others which may be of interest.

### INTERMEDIATE WORK

#### U.S.A.

LYNCH, C. J., AND BEARD, SARAH A.: *Books for youth*. (Published by the Brooklyn Public Library), 1931.

*Recreational reading for young people*. A.L.A., 1931.

#### *Magazine Articles*

GERBER, H. L.: "Books and departments for the 'teen age," *Library occurrent*, 9, 260-5, July-September, 1930.

NEWTON, DOROTHY: "Intermediates in the library," *Library journal*, 53, 820-1, 1st October, 1928.

ROOS, J. C.: "Adolescent reading and the Stevenson room," *Libraries*, 31, 450-3, November, 1926.

#### CANADA

TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY: *Annual reports*, 1930 and 1931.

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COVENTRY PUBLIC LIBRARIES: *Annual report*, 1929.

WALTHAMSTOW PUBLIC LIBRARIES: *A Year's experiment in intermediate reading*, 1924-5.

— *A Five years' experiment in intermediate reading*, 1924-9.

— *List of books of non-fiction in the intermediate department*.



## THE AMERICAN SCENE

ELSIE GORDON

WE have been told, on highest authority, and we know from observation and experience, that man shall not live by bread alone; of the many things of the mind and spirit by which man may live and grow none takes a higher or more commanding position than the satisfaction gained through books, through reading, and study. That many people in America realize this truth is evidenced by the growth in study groups, the increased use of reading lists, the germ of an idea for national library planning. What a people reads provides an estimate of national character and interests, and while the reading done by the library public does not tell the whole story, still it gives an interesting cross-section, a fair sampling of the whole. Many people have but just begun to realize their own possibilities, their own motive power, their ability to study without tutelage and to guide their own reading habits; these people and groups of people are a happy augury for the future.

However, bread alone assumes an increasingly larger and more absorbing position to the man (and his number is legion) who finds his bread increasingly difficult to get, whose butter is fast receding into the distance, whose jam is non-existent. As the pinch grows more pronounced, he becomes more vocal, and nothing reflects this tendency more than the modern so-called proletarian novel. This type of literature shows, among the most amazing strides, the most vigorous use of new techniques, the most remarkable departures from accepted patterns, of anything in our national life to-day.

The social question has interested novelists for the last century, ever since the Industrial revolution and the beginning of the machine age—the theme has been an ever-recurring one, and has absorbed the time and attention of writers continually; the death throes of the machine age and the growing pains of the new power age now upon us have caught the workers in their toils, and in

## The Library Assistant

reproducing the scene, novelists have produced an almost new vehicle, a new pattern, for the old theme—the theme of the struggle of man for bread. Probably it is entirely because the proletarian novelists of to-day are proletarian workers themselves that their manner is so arresting, their touch so sure, their appeal so convincing. Formerly, these novels were reports—sympathetic and sincere reports, to be sure—but still reports by outsiders looking in; to-day they are the stuff of life, the life that the writers themselves have actually lived, they are intimate, real, vital. And they are real because they are not conscious propaganda; they do not argue, they do not point a moral, they do not offer a solution—they simply paint a picture. The picture is that of the life of an individual, or oftener a group of individuals, in a given milieu at a given time, a picture so typical that it has power, appeal, conviction. That it is often a sordid picture, terrible in its misery and degradation, is the fault of our civilization; it is, nevertheless, a true picture as an overwhelmingly large group knows it; the novelist is earnestly absorbed in presenting it as he and his fellows actually know it, and therein lies its strength.

It is probable that none of these books will live as literature. It is true that they present an authentic picture of one phase of life at one period of history, and it is good that we should see this picture; they are stirring and vivid, but they are not personal and universal. Unless men of the future are very differently conditioned from all men before them, they will not want the mass or the institution or the abstraction as the outstanding feature—the individual must be picked out, his reactions must be analysed, he must be the dominant interest; it is in his reactions to the life about him that his life and age become quickened and are interpreted for others. Our age of mass production no doubt tends to obscure the individual; he must be sought for and lifted out from the mass, and this is the novelist's job and opportunity. What a story the pen and vision of a Michelet turned novelist, with his idea of "the race considered as an individual," could make of this stirring moment in the life of the world! But Michelet, alas! wrote history, not fiction, many years ago, and his counterpart has not yet arisen to give enduring meaning and body to the turmoil and struggle of the life of to-day. If it be true, as he wrote, that "he who knows how to be poor knows everything," then we of to-day, despite increasing acquaintance with poverty, still do not know how to be poor, but we are working with all our might to learn. In spite of fearless experimentation with new techniques, and in spite of driving power and conviction by the novelists of to-day, we still await the master's hand which will make this period

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significant. It may be that the master will be the historian, but it may equally well be the novelist who will interpret our civilization, who will gather up all these diverse threads into the finished fabric, as Balzac has done for the life of other days. In the meantime, our proletarian novelists are voicing the feelings and groupings of the time, and in increasing numbers we are experiencing satisfaction in reading them, and are gaining perspective and a sense of solidarity. If literature is in the vanguard, then it seems entirely certain that new and exciting changes in the social fabric are impending.

Side by side with this reading and writing of scenes and stories of the life of our day, there is evident an accelerated interest in facts and theories concerning our economic life. The many alphabetical agencies of the New Deal are subject to both eulogy and denunciation, and also to careful appraisal; the causes and backgrounds of wars are being uncovered; banking, tariffs, money values, taxation, foreign and domestic trade, speculation and investment, all are being dissected; the relations of capital and labour are being analysed; even our much-vaunted educational system is being subjected to sharp probing. All these things touch the man in the street much more vitally than he has realized before, and he is reading about them and informing himself about them with an avidity and an intensity he has never displayed before. We, as librarians, have here a very real opportunity and privilege, as well as a ringing challenge, to supply unbiased critical statements on all these subjects, and to bring them to the attention of our readers.

Closely allied to the interest in these economic and sociological questions of the day is the wide interest in governmental and political problems. This interest has no doubt an economic background and has received a very definite impetus from the policies of the New Deal, and from the efforts of President Roosevelt and his advisers to make the "forgotten man" into the "man of the hour." There is the strongest possible incentive to supply material which may help to make our franchise an intelligent and reasoned implement, to add to the number of those who are really informed on public questions. An alert electorate is the only hope for a democracy, and it is indeed time for us to return to some of the ideas and ideals which were hopefully attributed to us by our founding fathers. It is also time that we gave some thought to applying these ideas and ideals to a machine age, a power age, a mass-production era.

If we wish to do our part to make our government into the best possible system under which to live, what can we learn from other countries and from other experiences? The quest for an answer to this leading question of the day

## The Library Assistant

takes our readers into all countries, not only of to-day, but of all time. History becomes a living thing when approached in this way; Governments and peoples of to-day become subjects for careful consideration. So also do the lives and thoughts and actions of leaders of men of all the ages. The interpretation of the lives of these men is an art much appreciated by readers, and the application of their ideas to problems of our time becomes a subject of paramount importance.

What shall we do with the time when we are not working, how shall we occupy our hands, how shall we amuse ourselves? This question also occupies a large place in the minds of readers. That many of them are using a part of their leisure time for serious pursuits is shown by the increased number of lecture and study courses and by the increased popularity of these courses as evidenced by large attendance. And the demand for books on hobbies of all kinds shows a healthy interest in the arts of the amateur. Our readers do not expect to become professional photographers, for instance, but they are anxious for books and lists of books on the art of photography—they are playing with it, just for fun! Likewise, there is a large demand for books and lists on handicrafts, on sketching, on writing poetry and plays, on the care of tropical fish, on stamp collecting—the list is long and varied, and the aim is to take the reader “out of himself,” away from his work-a-day world into a world where he can express himself in his own way and to his own satisfaction. The interest in games and sports is another outlet for “civilized loafing”; the result is an enormous demand for books on fishing, swimming, skating, archery, fencing, sailing, and many other sports and games, and satisfaction is keen that we are learning to play—furthermore, that we are learning to amuse ourselves, provide our own entertainment. That this spirit is spreading to all people, instead of being confined to children and millionaires, shows that we are outgrowing our adolescence as a nation.

It is in the field of belles-lettres that much of the most varied and interesting comment is made by our readers. It is in this field that we notice a rather definite cleavage in the ranks of readers. One group wishes only the tried and accepted work, and modern work must conform to the rules of the old; equally active are the members of the group who read modern work, work in new patterns and new techniques; it is only very recently that these two groups seem to be drawing closer together, to be coming nearer an understanding of each other. There now seems to be a very definite impulse towards a weaving together of the old and the new. In this field alone is there equality of interest;

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the older work, the backbone of our literature, stands up solidly with the work of the day and points towards the future. These enduring things which have given life and refreshment to readers in all ages gone by are doing so also to the readers of our day, and will continue when our so pressing interests are buried and forgotten. The readers of these works are the ones who come to the writing of our day with faculties sharpened, with keen analytic power, with the ability to weigh and consider and make intelligent choices. They are the ones to whom we must look to bring our experiment in living to a successful issue; this blending of the best of the modern with the best of the past is our hope for the future.



## THE DIVISIONS

### EASTERN DIVISION

A MEETING of the Division was held at Lowestoft on Wednesday, 17th October, by kind invitation of the Lowestoft Public Library Committee. Mr. G. A. Stephen, F.L.A., City Librarian of Norwich, was in the Chair.

The visitors first made an informal inspection of the library, the Juvenile Department, with its unorthodox counter and colour scheme, being particularly admired. Mr. A. V. Steward, F.L.A., the Borough Librarian, then gave a short paper entitled "New routine methods," in which he explained in detail the principles adopted by him to reduce to a minimum the routine work of his staff. A brisk discussion followed, in which most of the members took part.

At the business meeting, which took place after tea, Miss D. M. White (Ipswich) was elected to the post of Divisional Representative in place of Miss S. Jacka, who has taken a post outside the Division. A vacancy on the Committee caused by the appointment of Miss L. R. Holman as Borough Librarian of Heywood, Lancashire, was filled by Mr. A. R. Pike (Great Yarmouth).

### NORTH-WESTERN DIVISION

#### (LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT BRANCH)

A meeting of the above Branch was held in the Reference Library, Liverpool (by kind permission of the Chief Librarian, J. F. Smith, Esq.), on Friday, 12th October.

After the customary baked meats had been disposed of, the programme consisted of a symposium, on the subject, "Rules and regulations I consider necessary in a public library."

## The Library Assistant

Papers were read by Miss M. Miles (Waterloo), Mr. E. W. Moxey (Wallasey), and Messrs. G. G. McBride, W. Negus, and J. M. Williams (Liverpool). The ground was covered fairly thoroughly, rules both for readers and staff being proposed.

Most of the speakers seemed to—

*"Compound the rules they are inclined to  
By damning those they have no mind to."*

The discussion which followed was shorter than usual. This may have been due to the audience's complete agreement with all that the speakers had proposed.

In summing up, the Chairman, Mr. B. A. Hopson, stressed the importance of tact as part of the library assistant's equipment.

T. E. H.

### SOUTH-WESTERN DIVISION

A successful meeting of the Division was held at Winchester on 6th September. Some thirty members were welcomed by the City Librarian, Mr. F. W. C. Pepper, who conducted a ramble to the historic St. Catherine's Hill. After a pleasant climb to the summit, the party returned to Winchester for tea. At the evening meeting, held in the School of Art, an enthusiastic discussion took place on the relative values of the Film and the Stage in modern life. Mr. A. Ll. Carver, of Portsmouth, supported by Miss B. Cottrell, put the case for the Stage, while Mr. L. A. Burgess, of Southampton, and Mr. H. K. Bristow, of Bournemouth, put forward a strong plea for the Film. Mr. J. Hoskins, of Eastleigh, moved a vote of thanks to the speakers, while the Chairman, Miss K. R. Bennett (Portsmouth), thanked Mr. Pepper on behalf of the members for his hospitality.

### SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DIVISION

The first meeting of the Division of the winter session, 1934-5, was held at the Central Library, Cardiff, and consisted of "Discussions on various subjects," followed by a social evening. In view of the fact that this meeting was arranged to be of a general character, so that members might air their grievances or accord their praises, the attendance was disappointingly small, but this was amply atoned for by the keenness in debate of those present.

Mr. W. B. Harris initiated the first discussion on "The Professional status of librarians." After a scathing attack on the type of assistant who, being



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appointed to an assured position for life, promptly loses his keenness and potential business acumen, he went on to describe certain methods by which librarians could assist in helping the Public Library to attain its true position in the social community. He urged assistants not to confine their activities to their hours of duty.

The Hon. Secretary introduced the second discussion on "Problems of librarianship," but the members were probably exhausted by the previous discussion, and it deteriorated into criticisms of the Association.

The following programme has been arranged for December 1934 to April 1935:

- 19th December, 1934.—Cardiff. Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party.  
23rd January, 1935.—Swansea. Visit to Guildhall, including inspection of the Brangwyn Panels. Address by Mr. L. R. McColvin, F.L.A., Hon. Secretary, Library Association, on "The Work of the Library Association."  
27th February, 1935.—Cardiff. Debate "That the public library is inessential to the community." Debaters: Mr. A. Griffiths and Mr. J. Thomas, F.L.A.  
20th March, 1935.—Pontypridd. Visit to a coal-mine. Address on "Recent developments in children's library work."  
10th April, 1935.—Cardiff. Address by Mr. J. P. Lamb, Chief Librarian, Sheffield, on "Modern library technique."

Several members who enjoyed the flight to Bristol last April, when three aeroplanes were chartered to convey 26 members of the Division, are anxious to repeat their experience. Accordingly, enquiries are being made regarding a journey next June to Sheffield, where a general meeting of the Association will be held.

Will members who are interested communicate with the Hon. Secretary?



## CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

CENTRAL LIBRARY, HENDON, N.W.4.

7th November, 1934.

DEAR SIR,—

You will be interested to hear that "Recommended books" has been used with great success at this library. We find that the public like it, and that the attractive annotations have led directly to the reservation of many of the

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books listed in the first two numbers. Several readers have volunteered flattering remarks on its format and contents.

I wish this new venture well, and hope that many other libraries will support it.

Yours faithfully,

J. E. WALKER,  
*Borough Librarian.*

THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

9th November, 1934.

DEAR SIR,—

In view of the necessity of approaching the question of amalgamation of the L.A. and the A.A.L. in as well-informed a manner as possible, I think it would be wise to correct two small inaccuracies which have crept into the report of my address to the members of the Midland Division. These errors are contained in the last paragraph of page 239 of the November issue of THE ASSISTANT.

Apparently I could not have made myself quite clear. It is the present intention of the Joint Committee on Amalgamation to incorporate proposals for a Students' Section in the scheme which will be submitted to the L.A. and the A.A.L. What I endeavoured to convey to the meeting was that local branches of this Section would not come into being *ipso facto*, but would be formed wherever a desire for such a branch was made known.

The expression, "The Amalgamation Scheme would perpetuate the government of the Association by its younger members," which occurs later in the same paragraph, would appear to be a statement of my personal opinion. Such a statement would be improper in view of my position as Hon. Secretary of the Joint Committee. Actually, it is a quotation of an expression used by a distinguished member of the profession on first receiving the memorandum on amalgamation which was accepted by the L.A. and A.A.L. Councils, and on which the work of the Joint Committee is based. It was quoted at the meeting in answer to a criticism that the scheme would "perpetuate the domination of the Association by the big Chiefs." Fortunately, the general opinion of the meeting subscribed to neither of these two extreme viewpoints.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES REVIE.

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